

Washington Delegation Members Announce Mount St. Helens Advisory Committee (January 18, 2008)

Washington, D.C. - Twenty six years ago Congress designated Mount St. Helens as a National Volcanic Monument in hopes of promoting recreation, research, and education opportunities throughout the 110,000 acre region surrounding the historic eruption. Today, Senators Cantwell, Murray and Representatives Baird and Dicks announced the formation of the Mount St. Helens Citizen Advisory Committee to study and recommend ways to ensure continued public access and protection of one of Washington's most cherished symbols.

The independent advisory group, which includes elected officials from Skamania, Cowlitz, and Lewis Counties, local business interests, and experts on the Monument, will meet to discuss and explore the best future course of action so that Mount St. Helens will continue to be a key tourist destination and economic interest for gateway communities in Southwest Washington.

"When Mount St. Helens erupted nearly twenty eight years ago, it forever changed our environment, our local communities, and our very way of life," said Congressman Baird. "I join all Washington residents in wanting the very best for the future of the region and I believe our establishment of an independent advisory board will allow local community leaders, business owners, and concerned residents to explore the most promising way to move forward that will best serve the public."

"Mount St. Helens continues to be a major tourist destination and integral part of our state's heritage," said Cantwell. "We wanted to hear from local stakeholders on how we can collaboratively develop smart solutions that protect the monument for future generations, while preserving natural resources and the important role it plays for small business and environmental research."

"Because the history of Mt. St. Helens impacted us all, it's important to hear from a range of voices before deciding its future," said Senator Murray. "This Advisory Committee will serve as a sounding board for the views of the community. I encourage the public to come forward to help build a prosperous future for Mt. St. Helens."

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Washington state delegation members urged the Advisory Committee to invite representatives from the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service, environmental and recreations groups, impacted businesses, and the general public to ensure an open process that will allow members of the community to voice comments and concerns. The 13 board members will convene in the near future to begin a series of meetings that will be held in the three impacted counties, including Skamania, Cowlitz, and Lewis.

Included is a text of the invitation to Advisory Board members:

Dear Advisory Group Member,

We write to thank you for agreeing to serve on the Mount St. Helens Citizen Advisory Committee. Your dedication to this important issue will help ensure that together we can make the best possible decision for the future of the Monument.

As you know, Mount St. Helens has encountered many challenges in recent years, including limited funding, damage to roads impacting accessibility, the closure of Coldwater Visitor Center, and proposed development around the Monument. Concerns about continued access to the area for hunting and recreational purposes are also prevalent. Certainly, we must consider how to address these challenges and concerns as we work to ensure that the volcano most adequately meets the needs of our region.

The goal of the advisory committee is to explore the community's vision for the Monument's future. It is our hope that after considering all of the facts available you will make an informed recommendation regarding the best course of action for ensuring that Mount St. Helens remains a key tourist destination and economic engine for the area while preserving its natural resources and allowing it to remain a world leader for scientific research. While you will ultimately be responsible for determining who is invited to speak to the Advisory Committee, we strongly encourage you to consider inviting representatives from possible management agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service and the National Park Service, interested recreational and environmental groups, and impacted businesses. We would further encourage you as a committee to allow comments from the general public during some or all of your meetings. We have great confidence in the committee's ability to consider this issue with an open mind and its collective ability to discern the information provided in making its formal recommendations to us as federal lawmakers.

Our intent is for our role with the Advisory Committee to be limited. While we will likely send representatives to the meetings, we want to ensure that the Advisory Committee is as independent as possible. We expect that the committee

will arrive at its own recommendations on its own schedule. However, our offices are available to provide assistance to the committee as needed, particularly as it relates to obtaining information from federal agencies.

Attached is a contact sheet of the committee members for your reference. We have asked each of the three County Commissions to appoint one Commissioner to act as co-chairs of the committee and to alternate hosting the meetings in their respective counties. We expect that the first committee meeting will be convened in late winter or early spring.

Thank you again for your willingness to participate in this important and dynamic process. We will be in touch after the first of the year with further details. In the meantime, if you have any questions or need any additional information, please feel free to contact Kimberly Blake Pincheira with Congressman Baird's office at 360.695.6292 or Bob Dingethal with Senator Cantwell's office at 360.696.7838.

Sincerely,

Brian Baird

Member of Congress

Maria Cantwell

United States Senator

Patty Murray

United States Senator

Norm Dicks

Member of Congress

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